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Working Caregivers of the Elderly: Issues, Costs, and Opportunities

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According to the research, we know that half of all caregivers are employed, and that at any given time, 20 to 50 percent of workers are dealing with a caregiving situation. According to projections by the National Alliance for Caregiving, by 2007 the total number of employed caregivers in the U.S. is expected to reach nearly 15.6 million working Americans - roughly one in 10 employed workers.

Caregivers have more stress-related illnesses, utilize a company's health care plan more, and add additional costs for the employer. Working caregivers cost U.S. employers \$29 billion/year, which translates into an annual cost of \$1,142.50 per employee. Costs are a result of absenteeism, partial absenteeism, coming in late, and leaving early. Caregivers for the elderly report lower work performance, decreased physical well-being, and diminished levels of satisfaction at work and at home.

Funds spent to help with caregiving have a payback to the employer of 2.5 to 5 times the cost. If your company has limited resources at this time, there are several no-cost steps you can take to indicate that eldercare is now on your radar screen. Provide employees with a packet of information on helpful internet sites, local information and referral services, or resource centers. The best place to start to get information on family caregiver services in your community is your county office on aging. They can be reached at the following numbers: Honolulu Elderly Affairs Division - 523-4545; Kauai Agency on Elderly Affairs - 241-6400; Maui County Office on Aging - 270-7755; and Hawaii County Office on Aging - 961-8600 (Hilo) or 327-3597 (Kona).

NOTE SHRM MEMBERS: November is National Family Caregiver Month and a publicity campaign will take place during the month of November. The Executive Office on Aging is looking for an employer or employee with a successful caregiver experience who is willing to share their experience (possibly an employer's caregiver program or employee's positive relation with employer during a caregiver experience). If you are interested in sharing your story with media, please contact Wes Lum at the Executive Office on Aging at 586-7319.